



State of Tennessee
Department of State
Tennessee State Library and Archives
403 Seventh Avenue North
Nashville, Tennessee 37243-0312

**GOVERNOR DEWITT C. SENTER
PAPERS
1869-1871**

(GP 22)

Reprocessed by:

Kitty Mayo Durham
Public Services Section

Date completed: June 2004

MICROFILMED

INTRODUCTION

Lawyer, farmer, and politician, DeWitt Clinton Senter, as Speaker of the Senate, succeeded to the governorship of Tennessee in February 1869. After serving out William G. Brownlow's term of office, Senter was elected for another term ending in 1871. The papers of Governor Senter measure three linear feet, consisting of correspondence, two letter books, petitions for pardons, pardons, petitions of appointments for positions, appointments and removals of voter registrars, and other miscellaneous subjects. There are no restrictions on the material, and copies of items may be made for individual or scholarly use.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

DeWitt Clinton Senter succeeded to the office of Governor of Tennessee in February 1869 when William G. Brownlow resigned to take his seat in the U.S. Senate. A lawyer by profession, Senter was an elected member of the state House of Representatives from 1857 to 1862. In 1865 he served in the state Senate and was elected Speaker in 1867. The Senter Papers have been arranged by correspondence, letter books, petitions for pardons, pardons, petitions of appointments for positions, appointments and removals of voter registration officials, and other miscellaneous subjects.

Governor Senter inherited many problems as a result of the disruptions of the Civil War and subsequent Reconstruction, not the least being a mobilized private army, nine counties under martial law, the activity of the Ku Klux Klan and their imitators, the disfranchisement of most ex-Confederates, and an enormous state debt.

In 1868 the legislature passed a law making it illegal to belong to any secret organization. Violation of this act was punishable by a fine and a prison sentence. The original purpose of the Ku Klux Klan was to frighten the newly emancipated and enfranchised freedmen to keep them from voting for Republican candidates at the polls. Flagrant lawlessness evolved as a result of the Klan's formation in several southern and west Tennessee counties.

In his inaugural address the governor said "whenever it should be clear that the members of the Ku Klux Klan had been punished or driven from Giles County, then and only then would the militiamen be withdrawn." Included in the collection is correspondence from citizens containing lurid reports of atrocity and violence, but Senter learned upon inquiry from letters of responsible citizens that gross exaggeration and misstatement pervaded such letters. Several letters cite the desire for the disbanding of the state militia. In confirmation of these views Senter began to discharge the state guard, completing this in May 1869. By disbanding the guard he brought desperately needed tranquility to the state. His undated speech to the legislature reinforced his views on crime and violence.

The election law of 1866 gave the governor absolute power over the ballot box. The Senter Papers contain many appointments and removals of voter registration officials in all the counties throughout the state. By changing election officials where necessary in 1869, Senter was able to nullify enforcement of the disfranchising law for many white males. By removing three-fourths of the Radical election commissioners, the enfranchised Democrats united with the conservatives among the Republicans to re-elect Senter in the August 1869 gubernatorial election. The Democrats won control of the state legislature, which previously had been held by Radical Republicans, and immediately began to undo Brownlow's Radical reforms. With the restoration of suffrage for ex-Confederates, the Ku Klux Klan lost its reason for existence and, by the fall of 1869, the Klan was extinguished.

The state debt was another primary concern for Governor Senter. The lion's share of Tennessee's debt had been incurred by Governor Brownlow's large issues of state bonds to pay for railroad construction. An 1869 letter expressed concern about payment for the recently discharged state militia. A comparison of the state debt for the years 1861, 1865, 1867, 1869, and 1871 is included in the papers. Vision of a stable economy would also include increased railroad business. Senter stated "our railroads and public debt are blended into the intimacy of cause and effect." Documentation clearly indicates that the railroads were having trouble paying the interest on their bonds. Senter focused on the fact that railroad transportation was vital to the state's economy and, consequently, he was in favor of additional appropriations to railroads so they could fulfill their financial obligations. A great deal of correspondence relates to the appointment of various officials to the railroad companies.

A desire to eliminate the state debt propelled an interest in immigration. Governor Senter acknowledged that the revenues of the state were derived from taxation of property. The decade 1860-1870 saw a huge decrease in both land and personal property values. Fostered by the belief that population is wealth, foreign immigration was encouraged with the hope that acres of farm land would be converted to thriving industrial villages manned by skilled European mechanics. Several letters attest to the interest in immigration. Colonel A. C. Colyar, a longtime advocate of immigration, accepted a commission by letter as a delegate to the immigration convention at Indianapolis in November 1870. His immigration program was implemented by the organization of the Tennessee Immigration and Labor Association in February 1871.

On July 1, 1869 the Nashville *Republican Banner* published the police statistics for the Nashville Police Commission First Annual Report (1869) which is found in the Senter Papers. Crime rates had risen dramatically in the post-Civil War years, with over twenty-five percent of the crimes in Nashville being committed by freedmen. Prison reform was the subject of a special message of Governor Senter on December 6, 1869. The war left the state prison barren of resources needed to make a profit, and the prison system was left in a state of indebtedness. Overcrowding was a major problem, and many applications for prison pardons, as well as the pardons themselves, can be found in the Senter Papers.

The most significant achievement of the Senter administration was the provision for a constitutional convention held in January 1870. The existing franchise law was officially repealed. Suffrage was granted to all men who were twenty-one years of age and were citizens of the United States who had complied with the newly-enacted poll tax requirement. Other revisions made by the group placed a restriction on the state's power to lend monies, limited the governor's control of the militia, and gave the governor veto power. With the adoption of the new constitution in 1870 Tennessee was the first state to close the doors on Reconstruction.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS

- Gillum, James. *Prominent Tennesseans, 1796-1938*. Lewisburg: Who's Who Publishing Company, 1940.
- Phillips, Margaret I. *Governors of Tennessee*. Gretna: Pelican Publishing Company, 1968.
- Temple, Oliver Perry and Mary B. Temple, eds. *Notable Men of Tennessee*. New York: Cosmopolitan Press, 1912.
- White, Robert H., Ph.D. *Messages of the Governors of Tennessee, 1869-1883, Vol. 6*. Nashville: Tennessee Historical Commission, 1963.

PERIODICALS

- Alexander, Thomas B. "Kukluxism in Tennessee, 1865-1869," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 8 (1949): 218-219.
- Argersinger, Peter H. "The Conservative As Radical: A Reconstruction Dilemma," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 34 (1975): 182-186.
- Ball, Clyde L. "Public Career of Colonel A. A. Colyar, 1870-1877," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 12 (1953): 40-41.
- Belissary, C. G. "Tennessee and Immigration, 1865-1880," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 7 (1948): 231.
- Binning, F. Wayne. "The Tennessee Republicans In Decline, 1869-1876," Part I, *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 39 (1980): 471-484.
- Feistman, Eugene G. "Radical Disfranchisement and the Restoration of Tennessee, 1865-1866," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 12 (1953): 135-151.
- Henry, Milton. "What Became of Tennessee Whigs," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 11 (1952): 58-59.
- Parker, James C. "Tennessee Gubernatorial Elections, I. 1869-The Victory of the Conservatives," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 33 (1974): 33-48.
- Sharp, J. A. "The Downfall of the Radicals in Tennessee," *East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications*, 5 (1933): 105-124.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Dewitt Clinton Senter

- 1830, March 26, Born in McMinn County, the son of William T. Senter, a Methodist minister, and Nancy White Senter. Young Senter grew up on a farm in Grainger County, attending the neighboring county schools when they were in session.
- 1851-1852 Attended Strawberry Plains College.
- 1852 Began reading law at home under the instructions of Honorable T. W. Turley but only studied for about one year.
- 1857-1862 Elected member of the House of Representatives.
- 1859 September 1, Married Miss Harriet T. Senter, a distant relative, daughter of General P. M. Senter, County and Circuit Court Clerk of Grainger County.
- 1862 Arrested by Confederate authorities and was a political prisoner for six months.
- 1865 January, Elected state senator from Claiborne, Grainger, Anderson, and Campbell counties. Served as Chairman of Committee of Incorporations.
- 1865-1866 President of the Cincinnati, Cumberland Gap and Charleston Railroad.
- 1867-1869 Served as Speaker of the Senate.
- 1869 February 25, Succeeded to office of Governor of Tennessee when William G. Brownlow resigned to become a U.S. senator.
- 1869 Elected Governor of Tennessee, defeating General William B. Stokes.
- 1898 June 14, Died. Buried in Jarnigan Cemetery in Morristown, Tennessee.

CONTAINER LIST

Microfilm Roll #1

Box 1

1. Correspondence—Governor Dewitt C. Senter, 1869-1871
2. Correspondence—General – Able-Custead, 1869
3. Correspondence—General – Davis-Hyde, 1869
4. Correspondence—General – Ivins-Morris, 1869
5. Correspondence—General – Naynes-Rosenberg, 1869
6. Correspondence—General – Sale-Wright, 1869

Box 2

1. Correspondence—General – Abingdon-Currey, 1870
2. Correspondence—General – Davis-Ijams, 1870

Microfilm Roll #2

3. Correspondence—General – Jill-Murray, 1870
4. Correspondence—General – Nance-Swayne, 1870
5. Correspondence—General – Tate-Wise, 1870
6. Correspondence—General – Alexander-Dunlap, 1871
7. Correspondence—General – East-Isbell, 1871
8. Correspondence—General – Jacob-Osment, 1871
9. Correspondence—General – Padelford-Williamson, 1871
10. Correspondence, undated

Box 3

1. Commissions Issued, 1869-70
2. Letter Book, 1869-1871
3. Letter Book, 1871
4. Miscellaneous Correspondence—Bailey-Wright, 1869

Microfilm Roll #3

5. Miscellaneous Correspondence—Anderson-Wood, 1870
6. Miscellaneous Correspondence—Allen-Wright, 1871

Box 4

1. Legislative Address, undated. Re: Crime and violence in Tennessee
2. Special Subjects Re: Ku Klux Klan in Giles County – Petitions, 1869
3. Questionnaire returned to Senator Job E. Stevenson relating to social, economic, and political problems, 1871
4. Petitions for Pardon—A-G , 1869
5. Petitions for Pardon – H-Z, 1869

Microfilm Roll #4

6. Petitions for Pardon—Al-Mc, 1870

Box 5

1. Petitions for Pardon – Ma-Ya, 1870
2. Pardons—Arr-Wil, 1869

Microfilm Roll #5

3. Petitions for Pardon—Abe-Lut, 1871
4. Petitions for Pardon – McD-Woo, 1871

Box 6

1. Pardons – Ale-Hur, 1870
2. Pardons – Jam-Yar, 1870

Microfilm Roll #6

3. Pardons – Ale-McN, 1871
4. Pardons – Mar-Yea, 1871
5. Requests of Extradition and Rewards – Bea-Joh, 1869-1871
6. Commissions issued by the Governor, 1869-1870
7. Petitions of Appointments for positions – All-You, 1869
8. Petitions of Appointment for positions – Dun-Wha, 1870-1871
9. Petitions (Misc.) –and-Wri, 1869
10. Petitions, undated

Box 7

1. Petitions for Pardon—But-Woo, 1869-1871
2. Proclamations and Resolutions, 1868-1871
3. Rewards, 1870-1871

Microfilm Roll #7

4. Miscellaneous Material, 1869-1870
5. Miscellaneous Material, 1869-1870
6. Advertising Proclamation, 1869
7. Commissioner of Voter Registration, 1869-1870, Accounts
8. Appointments and removals from office, Bedford – Bradley, 1869-1870
9. Appointments and removals from office, Campbell – Cumberland, 1869-1870
10. Appointments and removals from office, Davidson – DeKalb, 1869-1870
11. Appointments and removals from office, Dickson – Dyer, 1869-1870
12. Appointments and removals from office, Fayette – Giles, 1869-1870
13. Appointments and removals from office, Grundy – Hancock, 1869-1870
14. Appointments and removals from office, Hardin – Henderson, 1869-1870

Box 8

1. Appointments and removals from office, Henry – Jefferson, 1869-1870
2. Appointments and removals from office, Knox – Lawrence, 1869-1870
3. Appointments and removals from office, Lincoln – Madison, 1869-1870

Microfilm Roll #8

4. Appointments and removals from office, Marion – Maury, 1869-1870
5. Appointments and removals from office, McMinn – Monroe, 1869-1870
6. Appointments and removals from office, Obion – Overton, 1869-1870
7. Appointments and removals from office, Perry – Robertson, 1869-1870
8. Appointments and removals from office, Rutherford – Sequatchie, 1869-1870
9. Appointments and removals from office, Shelby, 1869-1870
10. Appointments and removals from office, Smith – Van Buren, 1869-1870
11. Appointments and removals from office, Warren – Washington, 1869-1870
12. Appointments and removals from office, Weakley – Wilson, 1869-1870
13. Objections to removal from office, 1869
14. Resignations, 1869
15. Voting registrations, 1869
16. Special Subject—Morrow-Weaver Injunction (Governor's right to remove Commissioners), 1869
17. Correspondence—Elections, 1869-1870
18. Special Report—Nashville Police Commission First Annual Report, 1869
19. Franchise Law, 1869
20. Memphis and Ohio Railroad – Directors
21. Appointments to office – General, 1869

NAME INDEX

This is a name index of the correspondence in the Governor Dewitt C. Senter Papers, together with the dates of the letters. The figures in parentheses denote the number of letters, if more than one. The last numbers refer to the box and folder in which the material is to be found.

Box 1, Folder 3, 1869

J. B. Heiskell (3) Attorney, Memphis.

General O. O. Howard (1), Commissioner, Freedman's Bureau, Washington.

Box 1, Folder 6, 1869

W. T. Sherman (1) Secretary of War, Washington, D. C.

William H. Smith (1) Governor of Alabama, Montgomery.

Box 2, Folder 1, 1870

Neill S. Brown (1) former Governor of Tennessee, Nashville.

Box 2, Folder 2, 1870

Hamilton Fish (2) Secretary of State, Washington, D. C.

Box 2, Folder 4, 1870

James D. Porter, Jr. (2) Governor of Tennessee, 1875-1879, Paris, Tennessee.

Box 2, Folder 6, 1871

Neill S. Brown (2) former Governor, Nashville.

Box 2, Folder 7, 1871

Hamilton Fish (2) Secretary of State, Washington, D. C.

Thomas H. Humes (2) President, East Tennessee University, Knoxville.

Box 2, Folder 9, 1871

James D. Porter, Jr. (3) Governor of Tennessee, Paris, Tennessee, and Union City, Tennessee.

Job E. Stevenson (1) Chairman of Special U. S. Senate Committee, Washington, D. C.